CHAPTER II
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THAI-US RELATIONS

Japan occupied Thailand in December 1941. On 25 January 1942, under Japanese pressure, the Government of Thailand declared war upon the United States and Great Britain. Seni Premo, who was then Thai Ambassador to the United States, took the War Note to the US Secretary of State, Cordell Hull, and requested him for sympathy and support for the liberation struggle in Thailand. Hull responded positively and promised him that the United States would help in organizing a movement to free Thailand and that it would not in any event declare war on Thailand.

The United States recognized the Free Thai Movement (FTM), which emerged thereafter, as the legal Government of Thailand during the war. The FTM emerged as an underground organization working in league with the United States Office of Strategic Services (OSS) and the parallel British Organization Force. It waged a resistance struggle against the Japanese. Under its leadership, Thai villagers helped escaped...
prisoners of war and Allied fliers shot down over Thailand. Thai students in the United States were trained by the OSS and taken to Thailand. These students helped fly nearly four hundred American prisoners to safety, radioed target data, reported troops strength, equipped and armed ten thousand men, and organized fifty thousand guerrillas for action under the Southeast Asia Command. In the end Japan surrendered. Thus, for the first time in its history, through the FTM, Thailand collaborated with the United States in safeguarding its sovereignty.

At the end of the Second World War Thailand had several internal and external problems. Its transportation system was crippled. It had to pay a large sum to Great Britain by way of reparation according to the Anglo-Thai Peace Treaty of 1 January 1946. When it sought admission into the United Nations Britain barred the way. It presented a list of twenty-one demands both of an economic and a military nature. One of the economic demands was that Thailand should supply without payment up to one-and-a-half million tons of rice to neighbouring countries under British control. In the event of non-compliance it threatened to jeopardize the economy of Thailand.

3 Ibid. See also, Frank C. Darling, "British and American Influence in Post-War Thailand", Journal of Southeast Asian History (Singapore), March 1963, p. 91.

4 Nuechterlein, n. 1, p. 88.
The United States on the contrary adopted a most friendly attitude. It re-established diplomatic relations with Thailand in January 1946. It also provided a loan of $10,000,000 in the same year to enable Thailand to purchase railroad equipment and reconstruct the transportation system. It supported the application of Thailand for the membership of the United States. Thanks to US good offices, Thailand was able to settle its disputes with France and negotiated the first ever treaty between itself and China. Above all, the United States supported Thai leaders in the difficult task of establishing diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union and facilitated Thailand's admission into the United Nations. 5

When China became Communist in 1949, the United States took alarm and decided to do something to halt the advance of communism in the region. In February 1950 Phillip C. Jessup, US Ambassador-at-Large, came to Bangkok for a three-day conference with the US Ambassadors accredited to the various countries of the Far East. This conference emphasized the strategic importance of Thailand. It also noted that the people of Thailand were by and large antipathetic to communism. 6 phillip Jessup conferred with Field Marshal Phibun Songgram and sought his support in the battle against

5 Ibid.

6 During my stay in Thailand (from December 1973 to June 1974), most of the people interviewed by me described themselves as anti-Communist.
communism. Shortly after Jessup's return to the United States, President Harry S. Truman approved a grant of $10,000,000 by way of military aid to Thailand. Two months later, in April 1950, the Department of State announced that economic assistance would be extended to Thailand without delay through the Economic Co-operation Administration.

On 28 February 1950, Field Marshal Phibun decided to recognize the Government of Bao Dai in South Vietnam as an earnest of Thailand's solidarity with the Western Powers. He also supported the French-sponsored Governments in Laos and Cambodia and ordered closure of the Vietminh headquarters in Bangkok. In June 1950, when there was a conflict between North Korea and South Korea, Thailand came out in support of the latter along with the Western Powers. When the United Nations decided upon a military intervention in order to end that conflagration, Thailand sent four thousand ground troops to fight as an integral part of the UN forces in Korea. It also contributed 40,000 metric tons of rice, valued at $4,368,000, to Korean relief. The then US Ambassador to Thailand, Edwin F. Stanton said: "In addition to this, fifteen thousand men volunteered to fight in Korea, including Buddhist priests. Thai units in Korea made a splendid record. Their

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8 Darling, n. 1, p. 70.
9 Ibid., p. 78.
stamina, their courage, and their fortitude earned them the nickname of the 'Little Tigers'.

As Phibun Songgram had co-operated with the Japanese aggressors during the Second World War and had advocated a policy of "Asia for the Asians" in those days, the Western Powers had been inclined to doubt his sincerity and integrity. Indeed they had even been looking upon him as a war criminal. However, when he actively participated in the Korean struggle, the Western Powers freely forgave him for his role during the Second World War. He now began to be regarded as a close friend of the United States and other Western Powers. Frank C. Darling writes in his book, Thailand and the United States: "Thai co-operation in Korea virtually erased all doubts in the minds of the Americans regarding the pro-Western sympathies of Phibun, and thereafter the former dictator was treated with great respect by the United States in the heightened tension of the cold war."

On 19 September 1950, the United States signed an Economic and Technical Assistance Agreement with Thailand. This became the foundation of the subsequent Thai-US partnership. Under this agreement, the United States established a

12 Ibid.
13 Darling, n. 1, p. 78.
mission in Thailand called the United States Operation Mission (USOM). Thailand created a Department to work in close co-operation with the USOM and ensure that US economic aid was put to good use. This Department, known as the Department of Technical and Economic Co-operation, stressed the importance of basic projects such as would increase production, make new industries possible, improve governmental help, education, agriculture, and other services to the people, and expand the general economy of Thailand. The economic aid made available under this agreement consisted of grants for the financing of technical assistance, training abroad, and rural development projects. Among the first projects to be sponsored by the USOM were schemes for the eradication of malaria, for the installation of village wells, and for the dredging of the Chao Phraya River to provide a deep water channel to the port of Bangkok. Technical and economic assistance made available through the USOM totalled up to approximately $440.1 million for the period from September 1950 to June 1965. Of this, a sum of $365.9 was given in the form of grants; and the rest ($74.2) was made up of loans.

On 17 October 1950 Thailand and the United States signed an Agreement Respecting Military Assistance. Under


15 Ibid.

the terms of this agreement the United States agreed to provide weapons and equipment to Thailand and to give military training to Thai officers. After the signing of this agreement, Edwin F. Stanton, who headed the American team, said:

This agreement follows the request by the Government of Thailand for American arms and equipment to strengthen Thailand's forces with a view to enabling them to better defend Thailand and Thailand's people from any aggression which may threaten the peace and tranquility of this country. The agreement is not a military alliance nor is it a defence pact. The agreement contains no provisions for military, naval, or air bases. The Government of Thailand has not offered such bases, nor the Government of the United States ever requested such bases or any specific concession.

According to Thanat Khoman, a former Thai Foreign Minister (1959-71), the Thai-American military agreement of 1950 was the landmark in Thai-US relations. It was through this treaty only, and not through the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization that the United States acquired a full grip over the military aspects of Thailand.

Thailand was given a loan of $25,400,000 from the World Bank on 31 October 1950 by way of assistance in the execution of irrigation projects, the reconstruction of


18 Ibid.

19 Thanat Khoman made this claim in an interview to the author on 22 March 1974.
railroads, and the development of the harbour in Bangkok. This was the first loan ever advanced by the World Bank to any nation in Southeast Asia. 20 In 1951, a Military Assistance Advisory Group headed by Colonel W.H. McNaught was established to fulfil US pledges to Thailand made under the military agreement of 1950. A Special Technical and Economic Assistance Mission (STEM), established in 1951 with an outlay of $8,000,000, set up an American-supervised language centre to provide modern facilities for the teaching of the English language to the Thais. 21 At the end of 1951 the Mutual Security Agency (MSA) replaced the Economic Co-operation Administration (ECA). The MSA launched a vast programme of military, economic, and technical assistance. Thailand received as much as $7,000,000 under this programme. 22 On 4 July 1951, the Independence Day of the United States, "the Bank of America saluted the Kingdom of Thailand where independence had for centuries been the watchword of the nation". In both Thailand and America democracy had gone hand in hand with national sovereignty. "Both nations stood in the forefront of world efforts to promote and defend the democratic way of life." 23

In 1952, the United States sent twenty-eight shipments of arms to Thailand in addition to an unspecified number

20 Darling, n. 1, p. 79.
22 Darling, n. 1, p. 79.
23 Bangkok Post, 4 July 1951.
of fighter aircraft and naval vessels. Total direct military aid given by the United States to Thailand between 1950 and 1972 was of the order of $11 billion.

THAI SECURITY IN US POLICY

Early in the fifties, Thailand had to cope with a secessionist threat in the provinces of Pattani, Narathiwat, and Yela, which had a majority of Muslims. An organization called the Pattani Liberation Front actively fostered disaffection against the Central Government with a view to securing the secession of the southernmost provinces. Pattani had always been a difficult province and had flouted Central authority repeatedly in history. It was only in 1932 that it was finally subdued and pacified. The Communist Party of Malaya actively sympathized with the secessionists and helped them in organizing a guerrilla war.

24 Darling, n. 1, p. 81.
28 Ibid.
On the other hand, the people of Northeastern Thailand, which consisted of Nongkhai, Loi, Udon Thani, Sakhon Nakhon, Nakhon Phanom, Khone Kaeng, Kalasin, Mahasarakham, Roi Et, Yasothon, Ubon, Chaiyaphum, Nakhon Ratchasima, Buriram, Surin, and Sisaket, started agitation for a massive Government effort for the development of their part of the country. Northeastern Thailand was very underdeveloped compared with the other areas of the country. Thai rulers had never taken interest in the development of that area.29

Between 1946 and 1953, when the French began to reassert control over Indo-China, about eighty thousand Vietnamese refugees owing allegiance to the Government of Ho Chi Minh fled across the Mekong and reached Northeastern Thailand. The Bangkok administration thought that they were supporters of communism and that they were, therefore, a menace from the point of view of the security and integrity of Thailand. As they could not be repatriated, the military rulers of Thailand dealt with them in a ruthless manner.30

On 31 January 1953, the People's Republic of China announced the establishment of a Thai Autonomous People's Government in the Yunnan districts of Cheli, Nanchao, Fuhai, and Chenyeh and in parts of Liushun, Szu mao, Ningkiang, and Chiang cheng. These areas, which the Thais called

29 Bangkok Post, 24 February 1974.
30 For details, see Peter A. Poole, The Vietnamese in Thailand: A Historical Perspective (London, 1970).
Sibsongpanna, were about 20,000 square kilometres in extent and had a predominantly Thai population of about 20,000. 31

In their announcement the Chinese Communists stated that

...at the inaugural ceremony the Chairman and Council members pledged that they would learn from the Han Chinese and the example of the Han Chinese cadres to guide the Thai people to help other national minorities to implement area autonomy, make concerted efforts to smash the sabotage activities of the American imperialists and special agents of Chiang Kai-shek's bandit gang and struggle to strengthen national defence of the fatherland and construct a new Hsi-Shuangpan-na/Sibsongpanna area under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, Chairman Mao Tse-tung and the Central People's Government. 32

The Thai Autonomous People's Government had its own radio, the Voice of the People of Thailand, which it used for propaganda aimed at "exposing" the "sinister" character of American activities and at "unmasking" the "corrupt" military rulers of Thailand. It also started a guerrilla war against the military regime of Phibun Songgram. Thai rulers thus found a big challenge in the activities of the Thai Autonomous People's Government. 33


President Dwight D. Eisenhower of the United States said in February 1953:

... his Administration would follow a new, positive foreign policy to block any further advance by the Communists and bolster the nation's anti-Communist allies. A new look would be given to the American military posture, and a new stress would be placed on deterrent military power and collective regional security, appreciating that economic need, military security and political wisdom combine to suggest regional groups of free peoples, within the framework of the United Nations to help strengthen such special bonds the world over. 34

The US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, laid stress on the need to counter the threat of encirclement held out by the Soviet Union and its Communist-dominated allies. He added that "more attention would be given to Asia in the future and he voiced his concern for the security of Indochina, whose fall to the Communists would jeopardize the security of other countries in Southeast Asia". 35 Shortly after taking over as Secretary of State, he made a tour of the non-Communist countries in the region to find out for himself how far the leaders of those countries would be willing to join a military alliance with the West.

In 1954 the Vietnamese defeated French forces at Dien Bien Phu. This lent urgency to the question of forming a military bloc of the Western Powers. On 12 January 1954,

Dulles warned the People's Republic of China, and said that "their aggression in Indochina would have grave consequences". He reiterated his view that the United States should urgently develop its deterrent power and halt further spread of the Communist ideology. To achieve that objective, he wanted the United States to place greater stress on community deterrent power and less stress on local defensive power. He announced that local defensive forces in the non-Communist region would be increased, and observed that "their real effectiveness would be to detain any armed invasion long enough for the United States Air Force to strike at the vital industrial and communication centres of any Communist aggressor with massive retaliatory power". 36

President Eisenhower wrote a letter to the British Prime Minister, Winston S. Churchill, on 14 April 1954, explaining the seriousness of the Communist threat in Indochina and seeking British help in forming collective military organization. He wrote that if Indochina passed into the hands of the Communists, the ultimate effect of it on the global strategic position of the United Kingdom and the United States would be disastrous. He proposed the establishment of a new, ad hoc grouping or coalition composed of nations professing a vital concern in the checking of Communist expansion in the region. He pointed out that in

the past they had failed to halt Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler by not acting in unity and in time and had paid the price for their negligence through many years of stark tragedy and desperate peril. 37

Meanwhile Dulles persuaded Australia, France, Great Britain, and New Zealand to join in a Southeast Asian defence pact. Pakistan, the Philippines and Thailand were the only Asian countries to agree to join in it. Burma, Cambodia, India, and Indonesia were among those which opted to stay out.

On 6 September 1954 representatives of the countries which had accepted the Dulles plan to form a defensive military organization against communism met in Manila to give practical shape to it. Speaking on the occasion John Foster Dulles said that

...he had a sense of common destiny with the countries concerned in opposing the spread of Communism, which could take the form of open aggression, subversion, or indirect aggression. Since the free nations could not match the vast land army of the Communist powers, the United States would, therefore, think in terms of mobile striking power with strategically placed reserves. 38

The Foreign Minister of Thailand, Prince Wan Waithayakon, associated himself fully with Dulles's arguments. He said


38 New York Times, 9 September 1954; and Department of State Bulletin, vol. 31, no. 795, 20 September 1954, pp. 391-6,
that the proposed Southeast Asia defence pact should be patterned on the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). He felt that Laos, Cambodia, and South Vietnam should be persuaded to join the regional security arrangement. He also offered Bangkok to serve as headquarters of the new organization.39

The conference ended on 8 September 1954 with the signing of a treaty to create a regional defence organization to be known as the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO). The treaty had a Preamble and eleven Articles. Articles 2 and 4 constituted the operative part of it.40 Under Article 2 the parties to the treaty agreed, jointly and severally and by means of continuous and effective self-help and mutual aid, to maintain and develop their individual and collective capacity to resist armed attack and to prevent and counter subversive acts both within and without their territorial integrity and political stability.41 According to Article 4 of the Treaty:

39 Ibid.


(1) Each party recognizes that aggression by means of armed attack in the treaty are against any of the parties, or against any state or territory which the parties by unanimous agreement may hereafter designate, would endanger its own peace and safety, and agrees that it will in that event act to meet the common danger in accordance with its constitutional processes. Measures taken under this paragraph shall be immediately reported to the United Nations Security Council.

(ii) If, in the opinion of any of the parties, the inviolability or integrity of the territory or the sovereignty or political independence of any party in the treaty area, or any other state or territory to which the provisions of paragraph (1) of this article from time to time apply, is threatened in any way other than by any fact or situation which might endanger the peace of the area, the parties shall consult immediately in order to agree on the measures which should be taken for the common defence.

(iii) It is understood that no action on the territory of any state designed by unanimous agreement under paragraph (1) of this Article, or on any territory so designated, shall be taken except at the invitation or with the consent of the government concerned. 42

The treaty was accompanied by (i) a unilateral US declaration in the form of an understanding "that the pact was directed against Communist aggression"; (ii) a protocol on Indo-China; and (iii) a general statement of principles by eight signatories in the form of a "Pacific Charter".

With the signing of this treaty the United States became a formal ally of Thailand's and began to develop

42 Ibid.
its infrastructure from a military point of view. Military-oriented facilities provided during 1954-62 included upgrading and construction of minimal facilities at seven Royal Thai Air Force bases, ten Royal Thai Army base camps, two Royal Thai Army hospitals, two Royal Thai Naval bases, and miscellaneous facilities such as ammunition-storage facilities, all for the purpose of improving Thailand's defence preparedness. In November 1969, Leonard Unger, who had served as US Ambassador in Thailand, gave his testimony before the Sub-committee on Security Agreements and Commitments Abroad of the Committee on Foreign Relations of the United States Senate, and said that between 1954 and 1962, the United States spent about $97 million in Thailand on military-oriented projects. Of this, he added, about $35 million was provided by way of economic assistance largely in the construction of roads and bridges.

The following seven airbases were developed: (1) The Udorn Thani airbase, which was situated at a distance of forty-four miles south of Vientiane, was developed to enable it to undertake aerial reconnaissance missions, as well as to rescue pilots who bailed out or crashed in the war in Indo-China.


44 Ibid.
(ii) Nakhon Phanom, just across the Mekong River and about 155 miles from Dong Hoï, was turned into a base for HH-3C helicopters going out to recover airmen baling out over North Vietnam. It also became the base of the Fifth Air Command, responsible for training Thai forces specializing in helicopter-borne anti-guerrilla operations.

(iii) Ubon, about fifty miles from Pakse (Laos), was turned into a base for air raids over North Vietnam.

(iv) Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat), at a distance of some 470 miles from Hanoi, became the headquarters of the 9th Logistic Command, with several squadrons of F-105 fighter-bombers permanently stationed there.

(v) Takhli, at a distance of 370 miles from Hanoi, was turned into a base for F-105s and EB-66 jets. It was provided with electronic equipment capable of locating and identifying enemy radar sites and disturbing their recording screens.

(vi) U-Tapao was made the base for B-52 bombers, which could release bombs from an altitude of forty thousand feet. It was equipped with a 3,500-meter runway, the longest in Southeast Asia.

(vii) The airport at Dong Muang was developed for civil purposes for use by the various international airlines.45

At Sattahip, the United States developed a port capable of handling a total of eight vessels. In January 1968

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two vessels at the Delong Pier, one vessel at the Military Assistance Programme (MAP), and one oil tanker at the Petroleum, Oil, and Lubricants (POL) anchorage could be handled. Each of the four berths of the port was six hundred feet long. They were all created by erecting and then piling circular coffer-dams. The four berths were composed of more than one million square feet of pier with a capacity exceeding 120,000 measurement tones (M/T) per month. 46

Some writers rightly feel that after the signing of the SEATO, the United States began to develop Thailand as a launching pad to crush Communist activities in Indo-China. Airbases, roads, hospitals, and other activities were organized with a view to meeting the requirements of the US forces going to Indo-China to war with the Communists. 47 In the course of interviews some Thai professors, politicians, journalists, and civil servants explained to this author that Thailand agreed to all this because, as an ally of the United States, it did not want the latter to suffer defeat in Indo-China. 48


47 For details, see Venkataratnam, n. 7, pp. 57-110.

48 These included Somsekkdi Xuto, Rector of the National Institute of Development Administration (NIDA), Bangkok; Amara Raksasataya, Professor of Public Administration NIDA; Chira Charoenlert, Head of Protocol, Ministry of External Affairs, and others.
Under the economic assistance programme drawn up as part of the SEATO arrangement, the United States financed several works, including the 450-mile-long Friendship Highway between Bangkok and Nongkhai near Vientiane, about 100 miles of Route 12 in Northern and Central Thailand, and more than 3,000 bridges all over Thailand. Under a Rice Improvement Project (1951-57), about eleven rice stations were provided with equipment, facilities, and technical advice. Over 200,000 varieties and samples of rice were tested. Fourteen of the most promising varieties were selected for distribution. By 1958, about one-sixth of the farmers in the entire country were growing improved varieties with yield increase of 10 to 80 per cent and were receiving quality premiums of 10 to 30 per cent. From 1951 to 1958, the USOM provided equipment and financial assistance for the construction of earthen dam reservoirs; and by July 1958, about 110 such reservoirs were completed.

A SEATO Graduate School of Engineering (known as the Asian Institute of Technology since November 1967) was founded in 1959 in response to an increasing demand for highly trained engineers in the developing countries of Southeast Asia. It offered a two-year course and awarded the Master's degree in six areas of civil engineering: hydraulics, structures, soils, 

49 Unger, n. 43, pp. 613-14.
51 Ibid.
transportation, environmental engineering, and coastal engineering. Initially the SEATO decided to spend $15,700,000 for the development programme of the Asian Institute of Technology. The Institute enrolled eight hundred students a year, and almost all students received scholarships. In the first two years of its existence, the Institute awarded the Master's degree to about two hundred students from other countries too—such as India, Malaysia, Pakistan, the Philippines, South Vietnam and Taiwan.

In 1959 the SEATO sponsored a project known as the Skilled Labour Project to help overcome shortage of skilled workers in developing countries. Training centres were established under SEATO auspices in Pakistan in the Philippines, and in Thailand. Within eight years of its founding about twenty rural trade schools had been established with an average total annual enrolment of approximately eight thousand trainees. The number of trainees who completed their courses and found employment was about 12,000 students.

Another project that came up after the signing of the SEATO was a military-oriented project, known as the Military Technical Training School. A joint Thai-Australian enterprise, the School provided training for technical supervisors, foremen, skilled workmen, and instructors of the Royal Thai Army, Navy and Air Force workshops and schools. Thailand

and Australia provided Baht 13,000,000 and $600,000 respectively for a further expansion of the School to include a Motor Mechanic Training Centre. 54

In 1960 a SEATO Medical Research Laboratory was established to undertake investigations into the principal diseases of Southeast Asia, especially malaria and haemorrhagic fever. The laboratory devised a diversified training programme to be implemented in conjunction with the University of Medical Sciences in Thailand. Its Thai-US component sponsored lectures by eminent visiting medical specialists and provided help in solving many of the health and medical problems of the region. Another project—the SEATO Cholera Research Laboratory (1960)—played a leading part in discovering the pathogenics of cholera, in locating the disease, in handling its epidemiology, and in devising ways and means to control the disease by vaccine. Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States contributed to the work and expansion of the laboratory. The laboratory employed about eight hundred scientists, nurses, field workers and technicians. 55

In his address to the two Houses of the US Congress in Washington, D.C., on 29 July, the King of Thailand, Bhumibol Aduldej, expressed his happiness over US assistance to his country in these words:

54 Ibid., p. 16.
55 Ibid., pp. 22-24.
The United States was applying the old conception of family obligations upon the largest scale in giving assistance to foreign countries. The nations of the world were being taught that they were but members of one big family; that they had obligations to one another; and that they were closely interdependent. It may take a long time to learn this lesson but when it will be truly learnt, the prospects of world peace will brighten. 56

By 1960s, the Pathet Lào became active in Laos, and the United States started sending reconnaissance missions over Laos from its bases in Thailand. 57 As the Ho Chi Minh Trail lay through Laos, and Sam Neua and Phong Saly on the Vietnamese border had gone into the hands of the Pathet Lào, the United States was anxious to recapture those provinces from the Pathet Lào and place them under the occupation of anti-Communist forces. However, as it had accepted the neutrality of Laos under the Geneva Agreements of 1954, it ruled out direct interference. Meanwhile Thai military leaders were getting impatient to intervene militarily to reverse the tide of Pathet Lào victories in Laos. In March 1961 Thailand requested the SEATO to dispatch troops for the support of the anti-Communist Laotian forces. The SEATO Ministerial Council

56 Bangkok World, 1 July 1960.

met on 27 March 1961 to consider the request, but in spite of three days of hectic diplomatic activity the member nations of the SEATO failed to take a unanimous decision on it. The SEATO contented itself with a warning to the Pathet Lao leaders against the grave consequences of their disregarding their commitments under the Geneva Agreements of 1954.

This action did not satisfy Thailand's military leaders. Thai Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman immediately demanded that the SEATO should be reorganized and that the rule requiring unanimity for action should be revised. He declared that Thailand's faith in the alliance had been shaken. Thailand could not stay long in a state of insecurity in the midst of hostile neighbours. Prime Minister Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat charged the State Department with vacillating too often and intervening too little whenever a dangerous situation—whether in neighbouring Laos or in South Vietnam—arose. He warned that Thailand might leave the SEATO "if the United States did not take a strong and immediate step to halt Communist advances in Southeast Asia". On 17 May 1961 the US President, John F. Kennedy, sent Vice-President Lyndon B. Johnson to Thailand. Johnson assured Thai leaders of "the U.S. Government's complete

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89 Bangkok Post, 28 March 1961.
60 Ibid.
undertaking of Thailand's concern over the threat to peace and security in Southeast Asia". He also conveyed "the President's intense interest in the preservation of the independence and political integrity of Thailand and other free countries of Southeast Asia". On 19 February 1962 the US President sent yet another emissary, Attorney-General Robert F. Kennedy. Robert Kennedy told the Thais: "Thai-United States bonds are as strong as ever. The United States is dedicated to the security of Thailand and committed to help it against external force and internal subversion."  

Thanat Khoman visited the United States in March 1962 for talks with Secretary of State Dean Rusk on the question of the security of Thailand and to assess the danger posed by the victories of the Pathet Lao forces, which were rapidly advancing towards the Mekong River. Thailand wanted to halt the advance of communism while it was still at a considerable distance from its borders.  

On 6 March 1962, at the end of the talks, a Thai-US joint statement was


published. This statement reiterated US assurance to Thailand of full support in the event of any Communist aggression on Thai territory. The United States also pledged to help Thailand in opposing aggression and subversion in accordance with its commitments under the SEATO. It solemnly promised Thailand that in rushing its help it could not wait for the unanimous approval or co-operation of other member nations of the SEATO, so that the action taken might not be too slow or too late. As for indirect aggression in the form of infiltration and subversion, it said that it would give such aid and make such contributions to Thailand as it had done to South Vietnam. It also repeated its offer of help in building up the economic strength of Thailand and increasing the capabilities and readiness of the Thai armed forces to defend their country. 64

This communique was well received in Thailand. Thanat Khoman got an enthusiastic welcome in Thailand when he returned from the United States after the publication of the joint statement. Prime Minister Sarit Thanarat spoke to the nation over Radio and Television on 10 March 1962. He hailed the treaty, and said: "A true friend who is determined to help us, who worries for our happiness such as the United States cannot be found easily....If and when our country is invaded, it will not stand alone but will definitely receive

64 For full text, see Appendix 3, Also see Department of State Bulletin, vol. 46, no. 1187, 26 March 1962, pp. 498-9; and Siam Rath Weekly Review (Bangkok), 22 March 1962.
aid from the United States. 65 Thenom Kittikachorn, who was then Vice-Premier, said on 7 March 1962 that

...the joint communiqué gave Thailand a feeling of greater security. The United States will be quick in giving assistance to Thailand with men and materials and will not allow it to fall under an aggressor. As for indirect aggression, the United States will assist Thailand in combating infiltration and subversion by giving necessary equipment and providing expert advice. 66

The Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China criticized the joint statement. The Soviet Premier, Nikita S. Khrushchev, made a bitter attack on the Thai Foreign Minister, and said that "he was not a representative of the people but nominated by the remnants of imperialism who tremble with fear and hope that the United States will support them. The Minister could sign any treaty but people could change it." 67

Meanwhile the Pathet Lao forces continued their advance towards the Mekong River. On 6 May 1962, they took Nam Tha, capital of the Houa Khong province in northwestern Laos, which borders on China, Burma, and Laos. This made it necessary for Robert McNamara, then US Secretary of Defense, to pay a visit to Thailand, to survey the Laotian situation

for himself. He went there on 8 May. As one charged with direct responsibility for the defence of the region on behalf of the American Government, he found that the Communist challenge to US interests in Southeast Asia was indeed grave. The loss of Nam Tha had exposed the weakness of US policy in Laos, Thailand, and South Vietnam. If the United States showed weakness in Laos, the Communists would stage an offensive to overrun the whole region. McNamara, therefore, thought of implementing a single strategic plan to protect Southeast Asia as a region.

Thailand, too, brought pressure upon the United States to send troops to Thailand to forestall any possible Communist attack. The US State Department responded by agreeing to take some precautionary measures. On 16 May 1962, twelve US Super Sabre-jet fighters landed at a Thai airfield, followed by 1,000 marines of the US Seventh fleet. On the same day the SEATO Council representatives met in Bangkok, and decided that the arrival of US forces in Thailand was


69 The then Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, said in an interview to the author on 30 April 1974 that Thailand had not requested the United States to send its troops. It was an American decision in which the military rulers had acquiesced.

wholly consistent with the United Nations Charter. Field Marshal Sarit Thanarat said on 15 May 1962 that "the entry of the United States troops had become necessary because the circumstances following the fall of Nam Tha constituted a threat to the Kingdom of Thailand and safety of the Thai people".

The Soviet Union was understandably very critical about the dispatch of US troops to Thailand. It accused the United States of robbing Thai people of their freedom. On 17 May 1962, in a speech during his tour to Bulgaria, Khrushchev said:

President Kennedy was taking an imprudent action in ordering the U.S. troops into Thailand. The U.S. troops will be chased out of Thailand in the long run even if the Americans fight there for 15 years. This landing will have the effect of a catalyst on the Thai people in their struggle for independence and freedom. The U.S. is afraid of the people of Thailand, as they were afraid of the small people of Laos. That is why they landed their Marines.

The deployment of US forces in Thailand in May 1962 brought to light a number of weaknesses in Thailand's logistical infrastructure. In June 1962 Thailand and the United States worked out a number of steps to rectify them. The first of these was the formation of a body called Special

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71 Ibid.
72 Siam Rath Weekly Review, 16 May 1962.
Logistics Action, Thailand (SALT), on 19 March 1963. The United States agreed to provide locomotives, as well as POL cars, so that they might be available to support the operations of the US forces as well as the forces of other members of the SEATO whenever called for. It also agreed to upgrade the airbase at Nakhon Phanom and to preposition heavy items such as ordnance engineer equipment, combat pipelines, and other materials at Korat. 74 It expressed its happiness with Thai participation in the deployment of US troops in May 1962. By way of appreciation it provided Thailand with military aid worth $50,000,000 for the Fiscal Year 1963. 75

Another important development during 1962 was the establishment of the Thai-SEATO Community Development Centre at Ubol on 20 November. The objective of this Centre was to stimulate democratic practices through organization of village development committees, and to raise village standards of living by assisting in self-help projects and introducing profitable agricultural and home industry projects. The US share in this enterprise included $115,000 worth of equipment, the services of a community development advisor, and a specialist in soil and water conservation, in addition to training grants. An agricultural economist from Great Britain, a village road expert from Australia, and a village road expert

75 Darling, n. 1, p. 207.
from Pakistan were also provided. Besides, there were two native experts—a social anthropologist and an agricultural specialist. Pakistan also provided twenty heads of thoroughbred of cattle for the Centre. 76

In 1964 the USOM introduced an Accelerated Rural Development (ARD) programme with the long-term objective of raising the standard of living of rural people in backward areas through use of improved agricultural techniques, more reliable means of transportation, community development, and reduction in the incidence of disease. It diverted 67 per cent of grant aid to this programme. The ARD programme sought to popularize use of fertilizers in the six border provinces of Northeastern Thailand. During 1963-65, about 1,400 tons of fertilizer was procured for distribution among 55,000 farmers for individual farm demonstrations. 77

US INVOLVEMENT IN THE VIETNAM WAR AND THAI CO-OPERATION

In the early sixties, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense McNamara, Assistant Secretary of State William Bundy, and also the military regime of Sarit Thanarat were inclined to regard the Vietnam problem as an essentially military problem. When John F. Kennedy sent

76 Thai-S.E.A.T.O. Community Development Centre in Ubol (Bangkok), December 1962, p. 1.
77 Dommenn, n. 16, pp. 4-9.
General Maxwell Taylor and White House Special Assistant Walt Rostow to visit South Vietnam and report on the feasibility of alternative plans for military intervention, they wrote back:

The introduction of a U.S. military Task Force without delay offers definitely more advantages than it creates risks and difficulties. Without such action our programme to save South Vietnam would not succeed. The Task Force would show to Southeast Asia the seriousness of the U.S. intent to resist a Communist takeover. The size of the force should not exceed 8,000. 78

This report was immediately accepted by Secretary of Defense McNamara and Deputy Secretary Roswell Gilpatric and ultimately by the US President, John F. Kennedy. By 1964, the United States decided on military intervention against the Communists in Vietnam. It requested Thailand to permit it to station its troops, armaments, and planes on Thai soil, and to carry on war against the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam from Thai bases. Thailand agreed. Thus it was that thousands of US troops came to Thailand. In addition to the 9th Logistic Command and a total of 3,300 military personnel already there, several strike aircraft were now stationed in Thailand. Tactical reconnaissance aircraft such as the RF101 were deployed to support the US strike force. Thus, about 9,000 US Air Force personnel and about 200 aircraft were sent

78 "Top Secret; Eyes Only for the President from General Taylor", 1 November 1961, Department of Defense, pp. 337-42. Quoted by Venkataramani, n. 7, pp. 95-96.
to Thailand. The strength of the military personnel was also increased by approximately 1,400 officers and men. This increase was due to and large to the upgrading of the 397th Signal Battalion in order to meet the need for higher-quality, more-complex, and larger-capacity communications facilities. This improvement required the deployment of about 200 additional personnel. In August 1965, the United States sent its 538th Engineer Construction Battalion consisting of about 1,200 officers and men.

Early in 1965 there was a war at Pleiku (South Vietnam) between the National Liberation Front and the Government of South Vietnam. US troops intervened on the side of the Government of South Vietnam. US aircraft started bombing North Vietnam and other Communist belts from their bases in Thailand. US airmen found in Thailand a retreat where they could relax and rest. This action resulted in a de facto state of war between Thailand and North Vietnam; for, according to international law, a neutral state that permits a belligerent to use its territory as a base from which to launch military actions forfeits its neutrality and becomes a party to the war. Technically, thus, Thailand

79 Unger, n. 43, pp. 615-17.

was at war with North Vietnam, and the latter would have been justified by law in retaliating. Indeed, retaliatory action by North Vietnam was now very much within the realm of possibility. Thai officials, therefore, demanded further assurances of solidarity from Washington. These came in the form of a plan called the Secret Contingency Plan, signed by General Stilwell on behalf of the Americans, and by General Thanom Kittikachorn, then Thai Minister of Defence, on behalf of the Thais. This plan was to take effect only in the event of Thailand's security being threatened by the North Vietnamese and Pathet Lao forces from across Laos. The Johnson Administration never submitted this plan to the American Senate. Secretary of State William Rogers, speaking about this plan on 20 August 1969, said: "Contingency Plan was pursuant to S.E.A.T.O. Treaty which expressly provided that it could be operative only after mutual agreement and consent of both nations." This statement was confirmed by the US State Department Press Officer, Robert J. McCloskey, who said:

...that the contingency plan could not be carried into effect without the specific agreement of both the United States and Thai Government. This plan had not expanded the U.S. defence commitments to Thailand

beyond that already in SEATO. It was a bilateral United States-Thai military contingency plan which involved the defence of Thailand against an external threat. 82

Senator J. William Fulbright, Chairman of the United States Foreign Relations Committee, said on 9 August 1969 that the plan may well involve the United States in another Vietnam-type war; for it provided for the commitment of a substantial number of US troops to Thailand in certain circumstances. 83

Thai military rulers, too, did not want the Secret Contingency Plan to be made public. The Chief of Staff of the Thai armed forces, Air Chief Marshal Dawee Chullasopya, said on 15 August 1969 that the plan was full of top secrets of military importance. He wanted the United States to seek approval of the SEATO before submitting the plan to the Foreign Relations Committee; for, he claimed, the plan involved not only Thailand and the United States but also other members of the SEATO. 84 This was denied on the same day by McCloskey, who said that the plan was a bilateral agreement which in no way affected the other members of the SEATO. 85

Hubert H. Humphrey, then US Vice-President, paid a visit to Bangkok on 13 February 1966. The joint communique

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.; Also see New York Times, 10 August 1969.
84 Ibid.
85 Ibid.
issued at the end of his visit said:

The U.S. express its gratitude for Thailand's initiative in seeking a larger regional framework for the peaceful achievement of social and economic progress. The U.S. is determined to provide all necessary assistance to enable Thailand and other countries of Southeast Asia threatened by Communist aggression to defend themselves to achieve in peace their just economic and social aims. 86

Humphrey also said that the United States would increase its military aid to Thailand and promised to provide $1,000 million for the development of the proposed regional organization. 87

The year 1966 witnessed the highest expansion of air power in Thailand. During that year Thailand approved of the US proposal to the stationing of the 606th Air Command Squadron in Thailand to train the Royal Thai Air Force in the techniques of countering Communist insurgency. To increase Thailand's strike capability in the event of a war with North Vietnam, the United States deployed three squadrons of F-4s and F-105s on Thai territory. By December 1966, the Thai Air Force had about 25,000 aircraft. As the war in Vietnam escalated, there was a corresponding increase in the use of Thai bases by the US Air Force. The United States established the US Army Support Command, Thailand (SUPTHAI), to support the Air Force by ensuring supplies, especially


87 Ibid.
rations and ammunition. 88

In January 1967, Thailand agreed to the stationing of B-52s at U-Tapao. On 22 March 1967 it admitted publicly that US aircraft stationed on Thai territory were attacking military targets in the Democratic Republic of North Vietnam. 89

On 16 November 1967 Thailand announced that it would send a division of combat troops composed of about 20,000 men to South Vietnam to fight against the Communists. It had already sent about 2,200 combat soldiers to South Vietnam.

A communique issued by the Prime Minister's Office said that Thailand had been compelled to join forces with South Vietnam and its allies in containing the Communist menace while it was still at a distance from Thailand. 90

In a speech in New York on 7 May 1968 Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn justified the deployment of Thai troops in South Vietnam, and said:

Americans, South Vietnamese, Thais and others had taken up arms in Southeast Asia to ensure that there would be no more Vietnams elsewhere. The full meaning of Vietnam war is much more than the preservation of the independence of South Vietnam. Vietnam is just one battle of a much larger conflict. It is a conflict between those who are bent on expansionism and extension of their domination and those who are not prepared to submit to them. It is

88 For details, see Unger, n. 43, pp. 615-18.
89 Ibid.
within the context of laying a foundation stone for the future peace, stability and progress in Southeast Asia that Thailand sent troops to fight in Vietnam. Because of the common resolve of the Southeast Asian people in Vietnam, there has taken place a chain of events in the region which in turn produced a new approach to our common danger and new general outlook in Southeast Asia. It is not a hope nor optimism based on the destruction and the military defeat of North Vietnam or Communist China but it is a hope based on the realization of the collective willingness and determination to defend the legitimate aspirations of the people of a small country. 91

By 1968, the US programme constituted the major portion of foreign aid in Thailand, accounting for about 75 per cent of the total assistance that Thailand was receiving from foreign countries.

**TABLE 1**

**UNITED STATES AID BY FIELD OF ACTIVITY AND PROJECT**

(In Thousands US dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Project</th>
<th>1964</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>1967</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(1) Security</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil police administration</td>
<td>2,177</td>
<td>6,479</td>
<td>14,075</td>
<td>20,019</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil action</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>610</td>
<td>1,098</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village radios</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>900</td>
<td>650</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Village security</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Field Project</th>
<th>1964</th>
<th>1965</th>
<th>1966</th>
<th>1967</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Units</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Security roads</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(ii) Rural Development</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accelerated rural development</td>
<td>7,402</td>
<td>8,877</td>
<td>20,999</td>
<td>22,745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARD training</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>986</td>
<td>1,880</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mobile development unit</td>
<td>1,922</td>
<td>350</td>
<td>744</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northeast agricultural development programme</td>
<td>791</td>
<td>717</td>
<td>2,868</td>
<td>2,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community development</td>
<td>470</td>
<td>232</td>
<td>354</td>
<td>791</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comprehensive rural health</td>
<td>387</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>1,040</td>
<td>971</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potable water supply</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1,533</td>
<td>1,367</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malaria</td>
<td>1,501</td>
<td>1,275</td>
<td>2,175</td>
<td>2,600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local development</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>166</td>
<td>245</td>
<td>387</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural education</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-55</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>814</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 kw. portable transmitter</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural electrification</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iii) Human Resources</td>
<td>1,233</td>
<td>464</td>
<td>1,672</td>
<td>1,296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manpower</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>655</td>
<td>277</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chiangmai Medical School</td>
<td>435</td>
<td>183</td>
<td>820</td>
<td>834</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocational education</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>125</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General education</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research activity</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Project</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1965</td>
<td>1966</td>
<td>1967</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------------------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(iv) Government Management</td>
<td>514</td>
<td>654</td>
<td>781</td>
<td>745</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management improvement</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>305</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Civil service</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>130</td>
<td>131</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>statistics</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>272</td>
<td>215</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs and pharmaceuticals</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labour Department Administration</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(v) Private Enterprise</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Industrial development</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>300</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of investment</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vi) ECO Infrastructure</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>1,052</td>
<td>2,809</td>
<td>1,174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feasibility</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>404</td>
<td>676</td>
<td>567</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mun and Chao Basin</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>678</td>
<td>335</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aeronautical Ground Service</td>
<td>84</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>1,455</td>
<td>272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highway</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>330</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(vii) Technical Support</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>1,693</td>
<td>2,237</td>
<td>2,020</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme technical support</td>
<td>864</td>
<td>1,084</td>
<td>2,237</td>
<td>1,854</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special participant training</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>12,488</td>
<td>18,639</td>
<td>42,982</td>
<td>48,309</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The United States helped in increasing Thailand's agricultural production. The chart below shows the agricultural development of Thailand between 1950 and 1969:

TABLE 2
AGRICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT OF THAILAND, 1950-1969

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Crop</th>
<th>Production 1950</th>
<th>Production 1969</th>
<th>Increase in Production</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(In Thousands of Metric Tons)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paddy</td>
<td>6,782</td>
<td>10,772</td>
<td>58.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Corn</td>
<td>26.9</td>
<td>1,700</td>
<td>6,219.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kenaf fibre</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>6,233.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassava tapioca</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>2,400</td>
<td>337.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Castor beans</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sesame</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>110.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Soya beans</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>158.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sugarcane</td>
<td>839</td>
<td>5,064</td>
<td>503.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peanuts</td>
<td>62.7</td>
<td>220</td>
<td>250.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cotton</td>
<td>20.3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>220.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the beginning of 1960, Richard M. Nixon became the President of the United States. Nixon's views on world affairs were similar to those of John Foster Dulles and Dean Acheson. According to Dulles, the two blocs in the Cold War represented a clear division not only in terms of military power, economic strength, and ideological orientation but also in moral terms, with total virtue on one side and total evil on the other. He once said that the United States should take up every military conflict as a moral crusade requiring the unconditional surrender of the enemy. He was convinced that democracy, especially the US pattern of democracy, was the best form of government and was ready to risk a third world war to save democracy from extinction. 92 Dean Acheson held that in spite of the death of Stalin, very little had changed in the Soviet Union. The Communist purpose of world domination through threat of military showdown was, according to him, unalterable. He tended to regard hard military measures as more significant in the Cold War than soft economic programmes. 93

President Nixon endorsed these ideas. For instance, when Eugene V. Risher, a correspondent of the United Press International, asked him at a newspaper editors' meeting

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92 Schlesinger, n. 68, p. 279. For details, also see Louis L. Gerson, John Foster Dulles (New York, 1967).

93 Schlesinger, ibid., p. 280.
whether the United States would close down the five airbases in Thailand if Hanoi released the American prisoners of war, he replied:

No, Mr. Risher, the airbases that we have in the area around Vietnam, of course, are there for reasons other than Vietnam. Vietnam is part of the reason. As you know, we have a treaty with Thailand and those airforces are maintained there, in part, in order to sustain that treaty. What it does mean, though, is that in terms of use of airpower, the use of airpower against North Vietnam and its forces, that if at an appropriate time two things have been accomplished - one, the return of our prisoners and two, the capability of South Vietnamese to defend themselves - once those two things are achieved, then the use of that airpower as against North Vietnam would no longer be contemplated and therefore our airpower in that respect could be reduced.

[signature]

However, President Nixon was not free to act as his predecessors—namely, John F. Kennedy, Dwight D. Eisenhower, Truman or Franklin D. Roosevelt—had been. It was because he had no majority support in the US Congress. Also, the US Press was very critical about the involvement of the US troops in Vietnam and in other Indo-Chinese countries. Above all, the Republican Party had charged President Nixon in September 1968 with the task of implementing a programme aimed at bringing peace to Vietnam. It had pledged to provide a settlement fair and equitable to all, a settlement based on the principle of self-determination and consistent with the

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national interests of the United States. It had also pledged to pursue a policy and a course of action that would make it necessary for the South Vietnamese to assume increasing responsibility. These were the reasons that led President Nixon to announce what is now known as the Nixon Doctrine on 25 July 1969 at a Press conference at Guam. The Nixon Doctrine spelt out the guidelines of US foreign policy. With regard to Asian countries, he said:

While the United States would of course keep its treaty commitments, it must avoid that kind of policy which would make Asian countries so dependent upon the United States that it is dragged into conflicts such as the one in Vietnam. This is going to be a difficult line to follow, but ... it is one that, with proper planning, can be developed. The time has come when the U.S.A. in its relations with its Asian friends, should be emphatic on two points: (1) America would keep its treaty commitments, for example with Thailand under S.E.A.T.O., and (2) as far as the problems of international security and military defence are concerned, except for a threat by a major power involving nuclear weapons, the U.S.A. has a right to expect that this problem will be increasingly handled, and responsibility for it assumed, by the Asian nations themselves. If the U.S.A. just continues on the road of responding requests for assistance, for assuming the primary responsibility for defending these countries when they have international or external problems, they are never going to take care of themselves.


On 28 July 1969, after announcing these guidelines at Guam, Nixon went to Thailand for talks with Thai leaders. On 29 July 1969, he said:

The people of Thailand value their freedom so much for themselves that they are willing to fight for it for others too. That is why Thailand keeps a special meaning for the U.S. Thailand is truly the land of the free, and it is this sense of self-reliance, of freedom, of willingness to fight for freedom both at home and abroad, that we wish to develop all over the world as something very proud to be associated with, with our friends from Thailand. 97

Nixon reaffirmed that the United States would honour its obligations under the SEATO and stand proudly with Thailand against those who might threaten it from abroad or from within. 98

Though President Nixon tried his best to clear possible misapprehensions about his policies, the Nixon Doctrine almost inevitably became a subject of acute controversy among Thai political leaders. The Thai Foreign Minister, Thanat Khoman, openly criticized the Nixon Doctrine. In a speech at the Foreign Correspondents' Club in Bangkok in August 1969, he said:

The first fact that need be repeated was that the United States of its own free will involve itself in Asia, and particularly in Vietnam. Secondly, the United States asked the Tha...
Government to accept American soldiers in Thailand. Among all the Asian people and nations, Thais are the one among which accepted, and still accepts, American soldiers on their soil....The third fact is that the American soldiers who are in Thailand don't come here to fight and risk their lives in the defence of Thailand against enemy encroachment. They come to Thailand to prosecute Vietnam war at Thailand's risk and peril. 99

Seni Premoja, the founder of the Democratic Party (Prachatipat), also criticized the Nixon Doctrine. He said:

Thailand joined hands with America and committed itself to the extent of allowing the bases to be set up here. It is adequate reason for retaliation if the North Vietnamese get it into their heads to take action. This has created a dangerous situation for Thailand. That commitment to Western camp made her most vulnerable to Communist attacks. In this situation, Thailand should make good relations with the people of East and Northeast Thailand, because they constitute the buffer with China, with which Thailand already wants to have good relations.100

Thanat Khoman began seriously to consider negotiations with Communist China and North Vietnam. He denied that


Thailand was anti-Communist, and said:

The object of negotiation was to find out what Thailand could do to live in peace. Thai foreign policy should be flexible, vital and progressive, and therefore Thailand should be prepared to send an emissary to Peking to bring peace and stability in the country. If the talks between China and Thailand produce peace and stability, then the huge amount of money going for suppressive operations against Communists could be used for schools and hospitals instead. 101

On the contrary, Colonel Narong Kittikachorn, son of Field Marshal Thanom Kittikachorn and son-in-law of Field Marshal Prapas Charusathien, opposed any kind of rapprochement in Thailand’s relations with the People’s Republic of China. He argued that without the help of the United States, Thailand would not be able to defend its sovereignty and also that close Thai-US relations held the key to the security of Thailand. 102 Military strongman Prapas Charusathien was also opposed to the idea of sacrificing the friendship of Taiwan for the sake of Communist


China. He wanted to restrain the Foreign Minister who had initiated discussions with a view to establishing diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China. 103

In 1971 Buchanan Attakhor, then Economic Affairs Minister, wrote a memoir which criticized the members of the Cabinet and exposed the weaknesses of the military rule. In November 1971 some political parties demanded in Parliament that Thailand should withdraw from the SEATO and in general disengage itself from US policies in Southeast Asia. 104 The military rulers found that there was growing opposition to their policies, and they, therefore, decided to stage a coup d'état to silence it. The coup came off on 17 November 1971: the Thai Parliament was dissolved, the Cabinet dismissed, and the Constitution suspended for three years. Foreign Minister Thanat Khoman and Economic Affairs Minister Buchanan Attakhor got the sack. On 18 November 1971, Prime Minister Thanom Kittikachorn, who believed in the need to maintain the status quo, justified the coup in these words:

The coup had been necessary because of the confused world situation and also because of internal unrest. The fears about the loyalty of the estimated total of three million Chinese living in Thailand had been a factor for the coup. With a Communist-led insurgency under way, the question of loyalty of these Chinese had become acute after mainland China's admission

103 Ibid.
to the United Nations. We don't know which ideology these people favour. If they favour communism, the internal situation may get more complicated because of the Communist insurgency in our country. 105

Thus the constitutional experiment started in 1963-69 ended abruptly in favour of the military rulers who had been supporting close Thai-US relations.

105 Ibid., 19 November 1971.